

# From Perils of Pauline and plays

By DeMaris Berry  
Of The Southern Illinoian

What is now the P. N. Hirsch building in Pinckneyville may not look like a place where a beautiful blonde woman escaped time after time from horrible dangers.

But it happened every week for several weeks — not in reality — in the movie serial, "The Perils of Pauline."

The second floor of what is now the Hirsch building was once the Kunz Opera House and "the entertainment center of the town."

Dean Bartle, a retired businessman, recalls the first movies shown in Pinckneyville were shown at the opera house.

"You could hardly call them movies. They were far from being perfected and were jumpy and silent.

"During the silent movies, Edna Thorpe Grunner usually played the piano. She was very good. When the action was fast, she played furiously, adding to our enjoyment," Bartle said.

He remembers paying 10 cents each week to see the movies.

"The serials always ended with the star in a dilemma. Someone would be getting ready to cut Pauline in half with a saw or tying her to a railroad track," Bartle said.

Edna Hincke, 78, of Pinckneyville, said, "The opera house was real nice. It would seat about 400. There was a beautiful stage with footlights and dressing rooms."

After the silent movie era, the stage was used for live presentations.

Sometimes the shows were put on entirely by a local club or organization.

## 'Everything' was once held at Pinckneyville opera house

At other times, a repertory company would be contacted by a club. Sometimes the company would present the entire show, but usually the company would send a person to Pinckneyville.

That person, who would have access to play scripts, would decide on the play, have auditions, and then act as coach and director.

"These productions were well attended. I think I was in most of them," Mrs. Hincke said.

The proceeds would be divided between the repertory company and the sponsoring club.

"I can only remember the title of one play I was in, and that was 'The Girl of the Golden West'," said Mrs. Hincke.

She said Parker Wilson, who was a Pinckneyville resident, wrote several plays that were performed without the aid of a repertory company.

"When there was a repertory company, the company provided the costumes for the production. Otherwise, we had to find or make our own," said Mrs. Hincke.

Traveling shows also presented plays in the opera house.

"Usually the cast was small. Sometimes one person would play three or four parts. I remember a show where one man, who was a quick change artist, played all the parts. Sometimes there would be vaudeville performances between play acts. There were a lot of dance teams, and in the 1920s the

song and dance man with the straw hat and cane was the rage," Bartle said.

"It seems it was in the late 1920s or early 1930s that some traveling salesmen set up in the opera house. I remember one salesman had an electric vibrating belt which was supposed to cure everything from fallen arches to arthritis and bad tonsils, Bartle said.

"During prohibition there were some dandy dances in the opera house. There have probably been more fights per square inch there than in any other place in town," said Charles Roe, who owns an abstract company in Pinckneyville.

The entire dance hall era apparently was not as wild as during the prohibition period.

Bartle recalls the Roland Fenton band of Mt. Vernon was a favorite area band. Traveling bands occasionally played.

The opera house, apparently while also functioning as a dance hall, became the site of the first indoor basketball games in Pinckneyville.

Mrs. Hincke said the high school played basketball in the opera house during bad weather. Otherwise, the games were played outdoors.

Bartle said the town also had a semi-professional basketball team that played in the opera house. The team would challenge other towns such as Du

Quoin, Sparta or Benton.

"The players would split the ticket money. There was always a pretty good turnout. You have to remember those days were before television, and there was not much entertainment," Bartle said.

As a child, Bartle recalls, he watched the opera house "like a hawk. My friend and I always wanted the job of passing the bills announcing the upcoming entertainment. I remember one cold evening when I was 11 or 12 years old, I saw some activity at the opera house. I ran over there and got the bills. I nearly froze passing them out. I returned to the opera house to get paid. Only then did I discover the bills announced a free show, and I had done the job for nothing. I should have read the bills."

He said a payment of 50 cents was considered a "windfall. Sometimes if I caught a bottle jockey in the right mood, I'd make that much."

Roe remembers attending Armistice Day ceremonies in the opera house when he was a child.

"My grandfather, an observer for Gen. Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War, spoke once. Another time I remember my grandfather whispering stories during the ceremonies, causing one of my friends to laugh so loud the speaker quit talking, and my grandfather just sat there looking innocent," Roe said.

Before the building was purchased by the Hirsch Company, which turned the second floor into a warehouse, the last activity Bartle remembers being held on the second floor was roller skating.

Nevins Ware, manager of the P. N. Hirsch store, said, "I've had persons come into the store and mention so many different activities that have been held upstairs, I've concluded everything has been held there.

"Although the seating is gone, there are still a few signs of the past, such as the balcony," Ware said.

## Sunday features

SOUTHERN ILLINOIAN, SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 1974



# to popular-priced apparel



Former Pinckneyville opera house now a department store

The exact age of the opera house building is unknown, but Roe estimates it is at least 100 years old.

"The lot where the Hirsch building stands, first sold on

Aug. 2, 1828 for \$50. Jacob Knuz bought the lot for \$35 in 1861 at a tax sale. Maria Kunz, the widow of Jacob, sold the land and building in 1921 to Jesse Dimond Jr., who sold it in 1924

to Max J. Hirsch," Roe said. I can't tell from the records exactly when the opera house was built. I'm about 60 years old and it was an old building when I was a child," Roe said.



# Pinckneyville's Historic Kunz Opera House Being Restored; First Masquerade Ball Held In 1895

The Kunz Opera House in Pinckneyville is receiving its first exterior facelift in many, many years.

New building owners Larry Wilson and Tom McDaniel, both of Pinckneyville who purchased the building in 1979 from Phil Corley of Pinckneyville, plan to restore the detail of the building.

Wilson said they plan to alter the P.N. Hirsch sign slightly to expose two vertical colonnades at each end of the building. The four windows of the second floor (which have been boarded up for several decades) will be re-opened, repaired and draped. The awning now in the front of the building will remain, but will be

enclosed with wood and ornamented with millwork brackets similar to the type used around the turn of the century.

## HISTORY

The lot sold for \$50 on August 2, 1828. Jacob Kunz bought the lot for \$35 in 1861 at a tax sale. Maria Kunz, the widow of Jacob, sold the land and building in 1921 to Jesse Dimond Jr. who sold it in 1924 to Max J. Hirsch.

Records show the building must have been built before January of 1895. Wilson said they believed it was erected in late 1894.

The late Ed Kunz, who was a descendent of its builder-owner, kept an invitation to a Grand Masquerade Ball that stated: "Yourself and lady are invited to attend a Grand Masquerade Ball to be given under the auspices of the Golden Rule Dancing Club at the new Kunz Opera House Monday night, January 21, 1895. Grand March at nine sharp. Admission: Gentlemen one dollar. Ladies free. Spectators 25 cents. Committees: Arrangements: E.K. Kane, George Leslie, Gus Schaub and W.A. Biby. Invitations: H.W. Hinke, D.H. Sullivan, and T.L. Baxter. Floor: Albert Davison, John K. Kane and George E. Hinke.

In the first floor of the building Kunz had a hardware store. He engaged in hardware and machinery business.

Wilson said the abstract of the building has been lost. Wilson also said the second floor of the building was used for the showing of silent movies, later live presentations, dances, receptions and even a friendly game of basketball.

After the Hirsch company bought the building the Hirsch name was inscribe over the Kunz, which could still be seen. However, Wilson regretted to say the repainting will hide the Kunz name.

After the P.N. Hirsch company moved into the building, their sign partially hid the Kunz name atop the building which could still be seen at the time.

Wilson and McDaniel hope to have much of the work completed before winter sets in.



**Kunz Opera House Between 1913-1915**

Poster on the utility pole makes note of a forthcoming play entitled "Uncle Hiram" on November 20, although the year cannot be made out. The sign in the store window and on the door advertises Bakewell stoves and ranges. Fireplace screens, stoves, a gun and a kerosene chandelier are pictured for sale in the front windows.

Photo courtesy William Timpner, Sr.



J. M. KUNZ

J. M. Kunz, a hardware merchant of Pinckneyville, was born in the province of Nona, Prussia, December 21, 1832. His father, Frederick Kunz, was a small farmer in the Old Country, where his entire life was passed. Our subject was the youngest of a family of six, there being four brothers and two sisters. Of this number, himself, one brother and one sister are now living. Prior to the age of fourteen years he attended the schools of his native land, after which he learned the trade of a blacksmith.

Coming to America in 1853, Mr. Kunz worked at his trade in St. Louis for two years, and then spent one year in Chester. In 1856 he came to Pinckneyville, where he followed his trade until 1883. By hard work and good management he accumulated some money, which he invested in real estate, and the property having increased in value, he has become well-to-do. He still owns considerable valuable real estate in Pinckneyville including the two lots on the east side of the square, where his store is located. He expects in the near future to build a fine opera house.

In 1883, when he left the anvil, Mr. Kunz engaged in the hardware and machinery business, in which he has since built up a large trade. He is one of the substantial and wealthy men of the city, and is respected by all who know him. Prominent in public affairs, he has served for six terms as Alderman, and is at present a member of the Board of Education. Politically he is a Democrat. In 1856 he married Miss Lottie Halkomeyer, and they became the parents of four children, namely: Theodore, who died at the age of eighteen years; Mary, who is at home; Henry, who is a traveling salesman for a St. Louis firm, and Jacob, who is employed in a hardware store in St. Louis. The mother of these children died in 1871.



The second marriage of Mr. Kunz united him with Catherine Wildemote, a native of Germany. They have eight children, as follows: Fritz, who assists his father in the store; Charles, who is also with his father in the hardware business; Emma, Tillie, George, Eddie, Arthur and Harmon, who are attending the public schools. Mr. Kunz and his family are members of the Lutheran Evangelical Church, and he was for many years a Trustee, but resigned from that position in 1894.

---

Copied from pages 829 and 830 of "Portrait and Biographical Record of Randolph, Jackson, Perry, and Monroe Counties, Illinois" Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens of the Counties etc.

Chicago;  
Biographical Publishing Co.  
1894.

---

Copied by Mrs.M.E.Spurgeon,  
710 Taffee St.,  
Pinckneyville, Ill 62274



KUNZ

---

1883 History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Cos., Ill 1883 by McDonough..

List of Partial Subscribers...

Jacob M. Kunz, P'ville Hdw & Groc. Nativity.. Nassau, Germany.  
Settled here 1856

Charlotte Harkemeyer, 1st wf. who d. 1868.. Nativity.. Prussia  
Settled here 1856

Catherine Wildermuth, present wf. Nativity.. Germany  
Settled here 1855

---

Marriages in Perry County, Illinois:

Kunz, Jacob M. and Maria K. Wildermuth	15 July 1871
George J. and Marareth Colligan	20 Oct 1902
Luccine and Joseph J. Witty	20 Sept 1895
Emma C. and Jno. C. Winthrop	26 Mar 1902

---

24 Aug 1977 Edition, P'ville Democrat...<sup>u</sup>Opera House (Hirsch Store)  
about 100 years old. Maria Kunz, widow of Jacob M., sold to Jesse  
Diamond in 1921. Ball held there in Jan of 1895. [1894 Biog. Book  
states he intends to build opera house in near future....so this  
building was built in 1894 and probably finished just before Jan 1895.]

E. Spurgeon



KUNZ

---

Large family plot in IOOF Cemetery, Pinckneyville, Illinois, is south of and very near the flag pole in the middle section.

KUNZ, Jacob M.	1832 - 1915	(Common Stone)
Mary C., his wife	1846 - 1934	
Fred W.	1873 - 1946	
Theodore H.	b. Jul 28 1854 d. (Stone broken)	
Charlotte, wf of Jacob M.	Married Sept 25 1855 d. Mar 8 1871	
	aged 38yrs __mo __d. (broken)	
Charles A.	Sept 17 1875 d. Mar 17 1918	
Ida K., his wife	Feb 2 1879 d. (Never completed)	

WINTHROP, Emma C., wf of J.G. Winthrop 1877 - 1909

As found by M. E. and Elizabeth Spurgeon 6 Jan 1978



KUNZ, MARY CATHERINE

111 South Peach, DuQuoin, Ill.

White, female, widow.

Husband was Jacob M. Kunz, dec.

Mary Catherine was born 28 October 1846 in Wittenburg, Germany

died 11 April 1934 DuQuoin, Perry Co.; Ill.

Father, Jacob Wilbermuth born in Germany

Mother, Catherine Schilling born in Germany

Buried, IOOF Cem., Pinckneyville, Illinois.

John Yehling, Undertaker. DuQuoin, Ill.

Arthur Kunz, informant

Reg. # 47

---

Birth Rec Bk 1/110 #1407

KUNZ, JOHN G. male. Sixth child born to this mother.

Father - Jacob M. Kunz age 49 born Germany

Mother - Maria Katherine Wildermuchk age 34

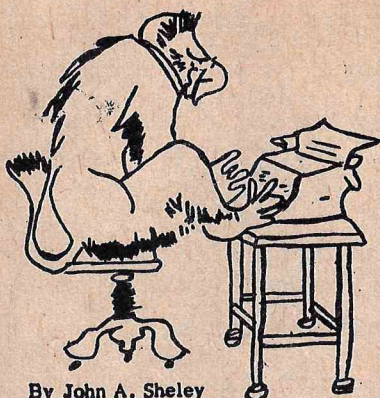
born Germany

Informant - Charalotte Driemeyer, Pinckneyville, Ill.

---

Elizabeth E. Spurgeon  
710 Taffee  
Pinckneyville, Ill 62274





By John A. Sheley

P  
i  
n  
c  
k  
n  
e  
y  
v  
i  
l  
l  
e  
  
A  
r  
o  
u  
n  
d

#### VIRGINIA'S REEL

By  
Virginia Marmaduke  
(Subbin' For Sheley)

**PRESERVING THE PAST:** It's a happy feeling to know that local businessman Phil Corley has purchased the Kunz Opera House building and that the art facade of the famous building is to be preserved...and even restored. A believer in Pinckneyville, Corley says the once elegant building and its memories shall be kept intact. One of its earliest memories can be traced through an invitation, formally folded and on expensive, Valentine type paper with lacy edges. Ed Kunz, a descendent of its builder-owner, has the document for safekeeping. It reads:

"Yourself and lady are invited to attend a Grand Masquerade Ball to be given under the auspices of the Golden Rule Dancing Club at the new Kunz Opera House Monday night, January 21, 1895. Grand March at nine sharp. Admission: Gentlemen, one dollar. Ladies free. Spectators 25 cents. Committees: Arrangements: E.K. Kane, George Leslie, Gus Schaub and W.A. Biby. Invitations: H.W. Hincke, D.H. Sullivan and T.L. Baxter. Floor: Albert Davison, John K. Kane and George E. Hincke".....It is believed this was the second annual Masquerade Ball held in the new Kunz building. In 1893 the Pinckneyville Minuette Club held a Masked Ball at the Murphy Opera House the second floor of what is now McDaniel's Furniture Store. It was discontinued as a dance hall when the new Kunz building was erected.



P'VILLE DEMOCRAT 9/12/84

AL &

PURSELL

## TO OUR MOM AND DAD

Once upon a time, in Pinckneyville, in 1934, at a dance in Hitches Opera House, (now the Dollar Store).

I know that MOM remembers, and DAD does too, I bet. Cause at that dance so long ago, is where these two first met.

On Halloween, they married, for years, they moved around. Then, down on Grand, by the railroad track, at last they settled down.

Mom just had one brother, her family it was small.

Dad's family had 8 kids, mom she loved them all.

Four sisters, three brothers, they would visit and talk by phone,

Mom and Dad said very soon, we'll have a family of our own.

And sure enough, a child was born, a bouncing baby boy.

Albert was born Independence Day, and he filled their hearts with joy.

Years went by and baby Janice, joined the family tree,

Born in January, and cute as she could be.

Now the kids are raised and gone, I know they miss them too,

But Mom and Dad now have the time for things they like to do.

Dad enjoys playing golf, Mom she loves her flowers.

She likes to work out in the yard, she stays out there for hours.

They liked to take the camper, I guess they always will.

They liked to go with the camping club, they never get their fill.

NOW FIFTY YEARS HAVE COME AND GONE, since Mom wore that dress of Green, and first met Dad at the opera house, happy times they've seen.

YOU TWO HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF TIME, for richer or for poorer.

CONGRATULATIONS MOM AND DAD, WE WISH YOU FIFTY MORE.

AL JR. AND JANICE



KUNZ, MARY CATHERINE

111 South Peach, DuQuoin, Ill.

White, female, widow.

Husband was Jacob M. Kunz, dec.

Mary Catherine was born 28 October 1846 in Wittenburg, Germany

died 11 April 1934 DuQuoin, Perry Co.; Ill.

Father, Jacob Wilbermuth born in Germany

Mother, Catherine Schilling born in Germany

Buried, IOOF Cem., Pinckneyville, Illinois.

John Yehling, Undertaker. DuQuoin, Ill.

Arthur Kunz, informant

Reg. # 47

---

Birth Rcd Bk 1/110 #1407

KUNZ, JOHN G. male. Sixth child born to this mother.

Father - Jacob M. Kunz age 49 born Germany

Mother - Maria Katherine Wildermuchk age 34

born Germany

Informant - Charalotte Driemeyer, Pinckneyville, Ill.

---

Elizabeth E. Spurgeon  
710 Taffee  
Pinckneyville, Ill 62274



KUNZ

Some Perry County, Illinois, deed records:

Kuntz & Driemier from Philip Carl Knapp	M/192 & 3	Mtge
Jacob Kuntz from August Schaub	K/605 & 6	do
Kuntz & Malone from Pat Malone	K/598	Deed
Jacob Kuntz from Trefftz & Slimbert	K/544	do
Same	Same	H/487 do



429  
4

# PORTRAIT AND BIOGRAPHICAL



—OF—

Randolph, Jackson, Perry  
and Monroe Counties,  
ILLINOIS.

Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent

—AND—

*REPRESENTATIVE CITIZENS OF THE COUNTIES,*

TOGETHER WITH BIOGRAPHIES AND PORTRAITS OF ALL THE

Presidents of the United States,

AND THE GOVERNORS OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS.

CHICAGO:  
BIOGRAPHICAL PUBLISHING CO.  
1894.



William H. Hypes, resides in Lebanon, Ill. June 24, 1845, Mr. Allyn wedded Mary B., daughter of Jonathan Budington. She was born June 28, 1823, in Franklin County, Mass., and died October 17, 1879, in Carbondale, Ill., leaving three children, Joseph, Ellen and Harriet. The last-named died January 10, 1883.

In 1857 Rev. Mr. Allyn left the east, and for two years was Professor of Greek and Latin in the Ohio University at Athens. In 1859 he went to Cincinnati, and was President of the Wesleyan Female College for four years. He then went to McKendree College of Illinois, of which he was President for eleven years. In 1874 he came to Carbondale, organized the Southern Illinois Normal University, and for eighteen years continued as its President. His work as an educator was most successful and won him prominence throughout the country. He was a member of the National Educational Association, the National Council of Education, and of the state associations of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Ohio and Illinois. He served as President of the associations in Rhode Island and this state.

In March, 1835, Rev. Mr. Allyn became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and from 1841 until his death was active in pulpit work. He delivered over thirteen hundred sermons, twenty of which have been printed. He was ordained a Deacon of the church in 1844, in May, 1846, was made an Elder, and was a member of the Southern Illinois Conference. He was one of the organizers of the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which has so materially promoted the welfare of the colored race.

In 1864 Rev. Mr. Allyn received the degree of D. D. from the Wesleyan University of Connecticut, and in 1875 McKendree College of Illinois conferred upon him the degree of LL. D. He was a prolific writer and furnished many able articles for the papers. He took an active part in politics during the slavery agitation, helped to raise several companies for the Union army and served as one of the Home Guards in Cincinnati during the war. He was also a prominent worker in the cause of temperance. During the latter years he lived retired at his pleasant home in Carbondale,

resting after long and faithful service in lines which tend to elevate and uplift humanity. He was taken ill with la grippe and passed away January 7, 1894. In his demise Carbondale lost one of its most honored citizens and the Methodist Church one of its most able ministers. In the school room and in the pulpit his example and teachings benefited those around him, and his influence will continue an active power for good in this community for many years to come.

---

**J** M. KUNZ, a hardware merchant of Pinckneyville, was born in the province of Pomerania, Prussia, December 21, 1832. His father, Frederick Kunz, was a small farmer in the Old Country, where his entire life was passed. Our subject was the youngest of a family of six, there being four brothers and two sisters. Of this number, himself, one brother and one sister are now living. Prior to the age of fourteen years he attended the schools of his native land, after which he learned the trade of a blacksmith.

Coming to America in 1853, Mr. Kunz worked at his trade in St. Louis for two years, and then spent one year in Chester. In 1856 he came to Pinckneyville, where he followed his trade until 1883. By hard work and good management he accumulated some money, which he invested in real estate, and the property having increased in value, he has become well-to-do. He still owns considerable valuable real estate in Pinckneyville, including the two lots on the east side of the square, where his store is located. He expects in the near future to build a fine opera house.

In 1883, when he left the anvil, Mr. Kunz engaged in the hardware and machinery business, in which he has since built up a large trade. He is one of the substantial and wealthy men of the city, and is respected by all who know him. Prominent in public affairs, he has served for six terms as Alderman, and is at present a member of the Board of Education. Politically he is a Democrat. In 1856 he married Miss Lottie Halkomeyer, and they became the parents of four children, namely: Theodore, who died at the age of eighteen years;



Mary, who is at home; Henry, who is a traveling salesman for a St. Louis firm, and Jacob, who is employed in a hardware store in St. Louis. The mother of these children died in 1871.

The second marriage of Mr. Kunz united him with Catherine Wildemote, a native of Germany. They have eight children, as follows: Fritz, who assists his father in the store; Charles, who is also with his father in the hardware business; Emma, Tillie, George, Eddie, Arthur and Harmon, who are attending the public schools. Mr. Kunz and his family are members of the Lutheran Evangelical Church, and he was for many years a Trustee, but resigned from that position in 1894.



**J**OSEPH F. DEROUSSE, one of the descendants of the old French settlers of Randolph County, and a gentleman who enjoys to an unusually high degree the esteem and regard of his fellow-citizens, was born in Old Kaskaskia February 8, 1832, during the palmiest days of the ancient town. He is a son of Francois, who in turn was the son of Joseph Derousse, and who was also born in the old French town. Here he grew to manhood and was united in marriage with Julia Danis, who, like himself, was a representative of a prominent pioneer family.

When our subject was about seven years old, Francois Derousse removed with the family to Pujol, a village some six miles from Kaskaskia, and there Joseph passed his youthful years. Educational advantages were not good at the time he was a boy, and in consequence his early education was somewhat neglected. April 19, 1856, he was united in marriage with the daughter of Antoine Casson. Of this marriage four children were born, three of whom survive: Celia, who is the widow of Frank Menard; Octavia, wife of Alfred Buatte and a resident of Wamego, Kan.; and Joseph, who married Letitia Udson, and is living near the crossing of the Grand Line and the Big Lane.

After the death of his first wife, who passed away on the 30th of September, 1872, our subject was again united in marriage, in 1879, choos-

ing as his wife Mrs. Sarah Pavau, the widow of Edward Pavau. This union has been blessed by the birth of two children, only one of whom is now living, Denis Leon, a bright lad of fourteen years. Mr. Derousse had twelve grandchildren, eight of whom are now living. The family is one of prominence in the community, and the children, who have been given excellent advantages, are highly respected in the localities where they reside.

In the spring of 1893 Mr. Derousse moved to his present holding, lot No. 45, Third Survey, Kaskaskia Commons, and here he and his family have a comfortable home, abounding with all the comforts and many of the luxuries of life. Mr. Derousse is a member of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the oldest congregation in the west, having been founded by Pere Marquette on his tour of the Valley in 1672. Like all the old French, Mr. Derousse has been a life-long Democrat and votes the straight ticket. While preferring to devote his attention to personal affairs, he has consented to serve in a number of official positions, in all of which he has discharged the duties with characteristic energy and efficiency. For three years he has held the office of School Trustee, and for nine years served as School Director.



**E**ZEKIEL J. HOLLOMAN, an agriculturist residing on section 13, township 7, range 6, Randolph County, cultivates a tract of one hundred and fifty acres, of which a part is hill and the remainder bottom land. Upon the farm where he now resides he was born April 20, 1850, being a son of Ezekiel and Mary G. (Brown) Holloman, natives of Middle Tennessee, both of whom were born in 1812, the former coming to Illinois in 1815, and the latter in 1828.

Until the age of eighteen years Ezekiel J. Holloman attended the district schools of his native township, when, owing to his father's ill health, it was necessary for him to take charge of the farm and assume the responsibility of caring for the family. Two years later the father died, and thus was thrust upon the young man a still greater re-



# From Perils of Pauline and plays

By DeMaris Berry  
Of The Southern Illinoisan

What is now the P. N. Hirsch building in Pinckneyville may not look like a place where a beautiful blonde woman escaped time after time from horrible dangers.

But it happened every week for several weeks — not in reality — in the movie serial, "The Perils of Pauline."

The second floor of what is now the Hirsch building was once the Kunz Opera House and "the entertainment center of the town."

Dean Bartle, a retired businessman, recalls the first movies shown in Pinckneyville were shown at the opera house.

"You could hardly call them movies. They were far from being perfected and were jumpy and silent.

"During the silent movies, Edna Thorpe Grunner usually played the piano. She was very good. When the action was fast, she played furiously, adding to our enjoyment," Bartle said.

He remembers paying 10 cents each week to see the movies.

"The serials always ended with the star in a dilemma. Someone would be getting ready to cut Pauline in half with a saw or tying her to a railroad track," Bartle said.

Edna Hincke, 78, of Pinckneyville, said, "The opera house was real nice. It would seat about 400. There was a beautiful stage with footlights and dressing rooms."

After the silent movie era, the stage was used for live presentations.

Sometimes the shows were put on entirely by a local club or organization.

## 'Everything' was once held at Pinckneyville opera house

At other times, a repertory company would be contacted by a club. Sometimes the company would present the entire show, but usually the company would send a person to Pinckneyville.

That person, who would have access to play scripts, would decide on the play, have auditions, and then act as coach and director.

"These productions were well attended. I think I was in most of them," Mrs. Hincke said.

The proceeds would be divided between the repertory company and the sponsoring club.

"I can only remember the title of one play I was in, and that was 'The Girl of the Golden West,'" said Mrs. Hincke.

She said Parker Wilson, who was a Pinckneyville resident, wrote several plays that were performed without the aid of a repertory company.

"When there was a repertory company, the company provided the costumes for the production. Otherwise, we had to find or make our own," said Mrs. Hincke.

Traveling shows also presented plays in the opera house.

"Usually the cast was small. Sometimes one person would play three or four parts. I remember a show where one man, who was a quick change artist, played all the parts. Sometimes there would be vaudeville performances between play acts. There were a lot of dance teams, and in the 1920s the

song and dance man with the straw hat and cane was the rage," Bartle said.

"It seems it was in the late 1920s or early 1930s that some traveling salesmen set up in the opera house. I remember one salesman had an electric vibrating belt which was supposed to cure everything from fallen arches to arthritis and bad tonsils, Bartle said.

"During prohibition there were some dandy dances in the opera house. There have probably been more fights per square inch there than in any other place in town," said Charles Roe, who owns an abstract company in Pinckneyville.

The entire dance hall era apparently was not as wild as during the prohibition period.

Bartle recalls the Roland Fenton band of Mt. Vernon was a favorite area band. Traveling bands occasionally played.

The opera house, apparently while also functioning as a dance hall, became the site of the first indoor basketball games in Pinckneyville.

Mrs. Hincke said the high school played basketball in the opera house during bad weather. Otherwise, the games were played outdoors.

Bartle said the town also had a semi-professional basketball team that played in the opera house. The team would challenge other towns such as Du

Quoin, Sparta or Benton.

"The players would split the ticket money. There was always a pretty good turnout. You have to remember those days were before television, and there was not much entertainment," Bartle said.

As a child, Bartle recalls, he watched the opera house. "like a hawk. My friend and I always wanted the job of passing the bills announcing the upcoming entertainment. I remember one cold evening when I was 11 or 12 years old, I saw some activity at the opera house. I ran over there and got the bills. I nearly froze passing them out. I returned to the opera house to get paid. Only then did I discover the bills announced a free show and I had done the job for nothing. I should have read the bills."

He said a payment of 50 cents was considered a "windfall. Sometimes if I caught a bottle jockey in the right mood, I'd make that much."

Roe remembers attending Armistice Day ceremonies in the opera house when he was a child.

"My grandfather, an observer for Gen. Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War, spoke once. Another time I remember my grandfather whispering stories during the ceremonies, causing one of my friends to laugh so loud the speaker quit talking and my grandfather just sat there looking innocent," Roe said.

Before the building was purchased by the Hirsch Company which turned the second floor into a warehouse, the last activity Bartle remembers being held on the second floor was roller skating.

Nevins Ware, manager of the P. N. Hirsch store, said, "I've had persons come into the store and mention so many different activities that have been held upstairs, I've concluded everything has been held there."

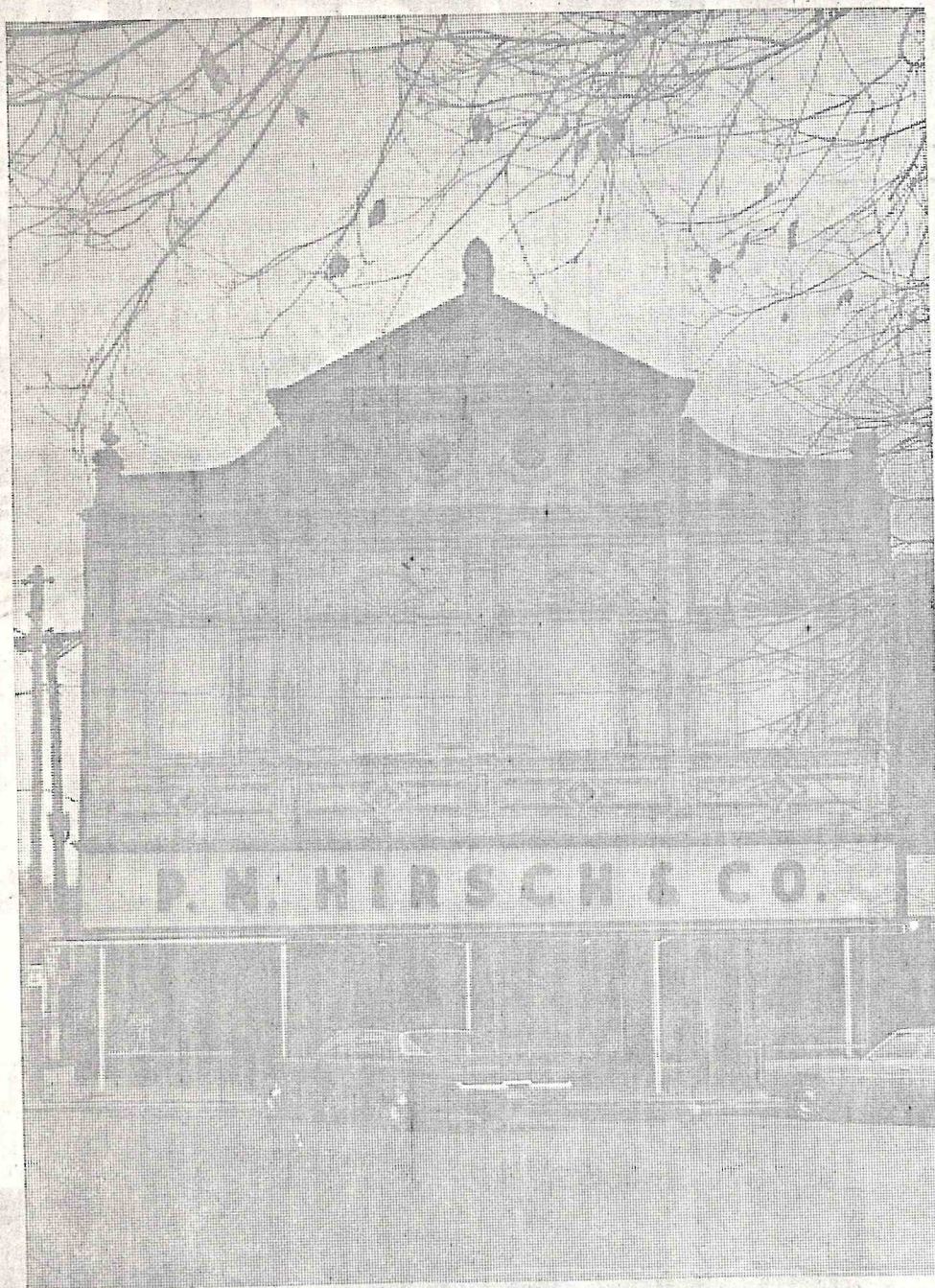
"Although the seating is gone, there are still a few signs of the past, such as the balcony," Ware said.

## Sunday features

SOUTHERN ILLINOISAN, SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 1974



# o popular-priced apparel



Former Pinckneyville opera house now a department store

The exact age of the opera house building is unknown, but Roe estimates it is at least 100 years old.

"The lot where the Hirsch building stands, first sold on

Aug. 2, 1828 for \$50. Jacob Knuz bought the lot for \$35 in 1861 at a tax sale. Maria Kunz, the widow of Jacob, sold the land and building in 1921 to Jesse Dimond Jr., who sold it in 1924

to Max J. Hirsch," Roe said. I can't tell from the records exactly when the opera house was built. I'm about 60 years old and it was an old building when I was a child," Roe said.